

Community consultation on home micronutrient supplementation 'Sprinkles' for Indigenous children in the Northern Territory

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Iron deficiency anaemia in Indigenous children has long been acknowledged as a major public health problem in the Northern Territory. Current strategies emphasise screening, treatment with intramuscular iron and health promotion. Despite these protocols and practices being in place for the past 10 years, rates of childhood anaemia remain unacceptably high. This six-month collaborative research project aims to provide formative findings on community knowledge, beliefs, sources of information and practices relating to the feeding of Indigenous infants and young children; and seek community direction for the distribution and implementation of a home micronutrient supplement 'Sprinkles'. Formalised community consultations through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with carers of 6–24 month old infants and young children were undertaken in eight communities. Key findings include: the majority of babies are breastfed; there is no consistent practice for the introduction of complementary foods; most babies have inadequate nutritional intake; there is reliance on convenience foods; there is existing knowledge about healthy and unhealthy foods but limited knowledge about vitamins, mineral, iron and anaemia; carers are willing to trial 'Sprinkles' and suggest breakfast as the most appropriate meal to add the supplement; health workers and female family members are key sources of health information. The overall recommendation from this project is that the use of a micronutrient supplement for children aged 6–24 months forms part of a comprehensive approach to addressing anaemia prevention in Indigenous communities. We will discuss the implications of our findings for current and future strategies and programs to improve nutritional status of Indigenous infants and young children.